

*Private Members' Business*

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs recently released its second report. In that report it is stated that while there was a wealth of ideas and energy on the part of aboriginal people in the area of economic development, for instance, there has been little improvement in recent years in bridging the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal income.

The unemployment rate of aboriginal people is shocking. It ranges somewhere in the neighbourhood of between 35 per cent and 50 per cent.

As my colleague from Nunatsiak pointed out earlier in the debate on this motion, an aboriginal youth employment crisis is looming on the horizon. This government needs to take action now.

Two-thirds of the Indian population is under the age of 25. Between 1987 and 1997, 140,000 aboriginal people will become eligible to join the labour force. If aboriginal employment rates are not maintained—and we are not talking about improving but just maintaining them—8,000 new jobs will be required by aboriginal people each year.

The federal government has got to take the lead in developing employment initiatives and providing jobs for these people, to take advantage of the ideas and the creativity which is being demonstrated by these aboriginal groups.

The federal government's own record is not what it should be. Little improvement has been made in the employment rates of aboriginal people in the federal public service and other employees covered by the Employment Equity Act.

Between 1987 and 1988 it was reported that the representation increased by only .07 per cent. There has not been enough done in this area.

According to the 1989 Canadian Human Rights Commission report, at the present growth rate it will take another 20 years before aboriginal employment reaches even 2.1 per cent, which is the current level of their availability in the workforce.

More must be done to improve employment and economic development opportunities for our aboriginal peoples. Educational opportunities are vital for the future of aboriginal youth and the success of aboriginal economic endeavours.

Approximately 60 per cent of Indians have a Grade 9 education. That figure is lower among aboriginal peoples of the Northwest Territories.

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs reports serious concerns that exist over the low quality of elementary and secondary education that aboriginal children are now receiving. The government has decided to restrain the growth of the funding which helps Indian students to attend post-secondary education institutions. We had that debate earlier and nothing has been done since to improve that situation.

The Human Rights Commission had these words to say in response to the government's restraint on growth: "We have understood on several occasions that given the importance of education, and particularly technical and post-secondary education, it would be worse than shortsighted not to guarantee every possible opportunity to enable native persons to pursue their schooling."

In closing, I call upon all members of this House to support the motion before us. I urge and encourage the government to develop the special initiatives necessary to deal with the health, employment and educational needs of Canada's aboriginal people.

**Mr. John A. MacDougall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the subject of the employment opportunities for aboriginal youth in Canada's north.

For six years as the member for the riding of Timiskaming I had the opportunity to have the lower end of James Bay, the communities of Moosonee and Moose Factory as part of my riding. I was able to work with the groups in that area and along the James Bay coast. Unfortunately, through redistribution, I lost the opportunity of representing them, but I still have the people of that area very close to my heart.

The youth of any society are its strength and hope for the future. This statement is particularly true in Canada's north. Its aboriginal people are in a period of transition, adapting their traditional ways of life to today's needs. Unfortunately, the transition has not been an easy one.

This government realizes there are certain stark realities that must be addressed. The Human Rights Commissioner, in his recent report, pointed out that unemployment, the exception for most Canadians, is the norm for aboriginal Canadians. Off reserve, in terms of